

Weekly Market Bulletin

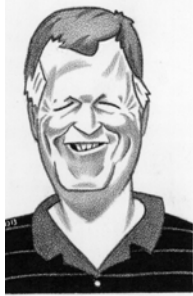
State of New Hampshire
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Department of Agriculture, Markets & Food
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From Your Commissioner...

Ag Statistics Titan Retires; Landmark Dover Farm Being Conserved, NH Sheep Please Hollywood

Not many Texans will adapt to cold New Hampshire weather and master the strange ways of New England speech the way Aubrey Davis has in the 17-plus years he's been the head of the USDA New England Agricultural Statistics Service office in Concord.

Davis retires next week from the job of gathering the data and putting up the numbers on agriculture in our six-state region. He's been responsible for a force of 35 field enumerators who gather information and 25 Concord-based statisticians and support people who create the numerous reports on crop and livestock production and the economic performance of the farm sector.

Following study at Texas A & M University and Army duty Davis joined USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service in 1967 and was posted first at Austin, TX, then Richmond, VA, Washington, Sacramento, CA, and finally Honolulu before landing in Concord in 1988.

As he says, in Hawaii he was responsible for six tropical islands, which he gave up for six frigid New England states.

In his years in New England he has continually fine-tuned surveys and reports to keep up with the ever-changing structure of the region's agriculture. Of particular note has been development of a reliable base of data on retail market values of fruits and vegetables, vitally important considering the high proportion of direct-to-consumer sales that characterizes the produce business here.

Davis has also tackled the challenge of collecting good numbers on the maple industry, not just in the New England states but for all the maple-producing states in the U.S. He has worked tirelessly to assure wary syrup producers that the information they furnish is used only for statistical purposes and is never shared with any other public or private entity, but he'll be the first to say a considerable amount of production never gets counted because of some sugarmakers' reluctance to reveal their crop yields.

While Davis has handled his USDA duties with great skill and intensity he's also pitched in frequently on efforts to strengthen agriculture generally, and he's been of great help on many initiatives undertaken by NHDAMF.

The next director of New England Agricultural Statistics will be Gary Keough, a native of Wisconsin whose most recent USDA posting has been in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

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One constant in the years I've been in this office has been the ongoing consolidation of the fuel oil business in New Hampshire. NHDAMF regulates the industry through its Bureau of Weights and Measures, and there's been a steady disappearance of small, independent mom 'n pop home heating oil companies since the 1970s.

This month a company that over the past three decades bought up numerous small oil companies announced that itself was being acquired by a larger competitor.

Lebanon-based Johnson & Dix, with over 30,000 customers from Concord west into Vermont, is selling its home

heating oil business and several convenience stores to Irving Oil. New Brunswick-based J.R. Irving is a family owned colossus with oil refineries, vast timber holdings, sawmills, food processing plants and trucking and media properties in addition to retail fuel businesses in the Maritimes and New England.

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America's oldest continuously owned family farm is in the process of being permanently protected through transfer of development rights.

The 142-acre Tuttle Farm on Dover Point has been in the Tuttle family for more than 300 years, and is currently operated by an 11th generation farmer, William Penn Tuttle III. The Dover city council has put up \$1.5 million in conservation funds toward a \$3.3 million land protection project being put together by the Strafford Rivers Conservancy.

Situated between the tidal waters of the Bellamy and Piscataqua Rivers, the farm includes prime agricultural soils, streams and wetlands and is known by thousands of Seacoast residents for its landmark upscale farm market doing business as Tuttle's Red Barn on busy Rt. 16.

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For Brianne Thibodeau, a 14-year-old shepherdess from Winchester, the year 2005 will be etched in memory as the time she and her sheep landed roles in a Hollywood film.

"Sensation of Sight" is a drama starring David Strathairn that's now in post-production editing for release next year. Strathairn is a veteran TV and film actor who is seen portraying Edward R. Murrow in the current film "Good Night and Good Luck."

Brianne and several of her sheep were hired to appear in the opening scene of "Sensation of Sight" as it was being filmed in Peterborough recently. She reports that the sheep impressed everyone on the set with their obedient behavior, requiring only three takes to satisfy the director.

"The most fun part for me was to be able to watch how a movie is filmed....Breezy, my Romney cross, the other sheep and I got to teach everyone on the set that sheep can be well-behaved, patient and quiet animals," Brianne writes.

"We also got a lot of compliments from many people, including David Strathairn, about how willingly the sheep followed me the 12 times we walked back and forth during the filming."

Brianne tends several Alpacas in addition to her sheep flock at Country Critter Farm in Winchester.

Steve Taylor, Commissioner